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Promotion and protection of the rights of children

Protection of children affected by armed conflict

Note by the Secretary-General*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly, in accordance with operative paragraph 5 of Assembly resolution 56/138 of 19 December 2001, the report prepared by his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara A. Otunnu.

* Submission of the present report was delayed in order to enable the inclusion of findings and recommendations arising from the Special Representative's country visits.

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Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to section II of General Assembly resolution 51/77 of 12 December 1996, in which the General Assembly requested the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict to submit an annual report on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. The report, the fifth since the mandate was established, covers the activities of the Special Representative during the period from 1 October 2001 to 31 August 2002.

I. Strengthening adherence to international norms and standards

New milestones: Optional Protocol and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

1. On 12 February 2002, the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict[1] entered into force, representing the culmination of intensive efforts on the part of Member States, the Special Representative, United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations. The Optional Protocol sets the age limit for direct participation in hostilities and compulsory recruitment at 18, and prohibits insurgent armed groups from recruiting, under any circumstances, persons under 18 years of age or using them in hostilities. The entry into force on 1 July 2002 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court represents another milestone in the protection of children affected by armed conflict. The Statute, among other things, defines the conscription, enlistment or use in hostilities of children under the age of 15 years, and the intentional attacks on educational buildings and hospitals as war crimes. It also makes both rape and sexual slavery a war crime and crime against humanity.

Eliminating impunity for crimes against children

2. The need to address impunity and to bring to justice those responsible for violations of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict continues to be a preoccupation of the Office of the Special Representative. It is also a key component of any comprehensive effort to strengthen and enhance adherence to international norms and standards for the protection of children. The Security Council, in its resolution 1379 (2001) of 20 November 2001, on children and armed conflict, urged Member States to prosecute those responsible for egregious crimes perpetrated against children and, where feasible, exclude those crimes from amnesty provisions. At its special session on children, the General Assembly echoed that appeal in its Plan of Action (see Assembly resolution S-27/2, annex).

3. The Office of the Special Representative has contributed to the overall efforts to provide concrete, child-centred guidance during the development of truth commissions and war crimes tribunals. It has been working with the Office of Legal Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to guide developments related to the involvement of children in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The Office has also contributed to guidelines and recommendations that will be conveyed to the Special Court prosecutor and judges, and to the commissioners and staff of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, regarding the protection of children as participants, victims, witnesses or perpetrators of grave abuses during the war.

Filling knowledge gaps

4. Management of the research agenda on the impact of armed conflict on children, which was initiated and developed by the Office of the Special Representative, was given to the Social Science Research Council in New York. The agenda has been redesignated the Research Consortium for Children and Armed Conflict. Fund-raising for the Consortium's initial two years of activity has started and an advisory board and an executive committee are being constituted.

5. The Consortium's research priorities over its first two years are: (a) making an inventory of existing scholarly work in respect of children and armed conflict; (b) development of methodological tools for generating data on different vulnerabilities of children affected by armed conflict; (c) examination of the impact on children of organized violence and trends in warfare; (d) role of cultural and local values in the protection and rehabilitation of children affected by armed conflict.

II. Child protection and the United Nations peace and security agenda

Security Council

6. The Security Council has continued to play an active role in the protection of children affected by armed conflict. In the present reporting period, four Security Council resolutions and two presidential statements and open debates made significant references to the question.

7. Resolution 1379 (2001) was adopted by the Council, following its consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/56/342-S/2001/852). On that occasion, the Council demonstrated its interest in hearing directly from war-affected children by inviting, for the first time, a former child soldier, from Sierra Leone, to participate in its debate. In resolution 1379 (2001), the Council, building upon its resolutions 1261 (1999) and 1314 (2000), reiterated its extensive support for efforts to advance the protection of children in peacekeeping and peace-building plans and processes, and requested the Secretary-General to attach to his subsequent report a list of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in violation of international obligations applicable to them.

8. On the occasion of the special session of the General Assembly on children, the Security Council convened an open session in which the Special Representative, the Executive Director of UNICEF and Graca Machel addressed the Council. The Council also heard from three children, from Liberia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and East Timor, about their experiences in war and their aspirations for peace. The open session concluded with a presidential statement.

9. The Office of the Special Representative also participated in two Arria formula meetings with the Council, on women, peace and security, and on Angola, and has participated in briefings of Council members in advance of their visits to several countries, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Angola.

10. The Office of the Special Representative also serves as the focal point for the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on children and armed conflict.

Working group on the incorporation of child protection into United Nations peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building operations

11. The working group convened at the initiative of the Office of the Special Representative together with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNICEF, has drafted the first set of guidance material, entitled "Crafting a child-conscious peace process: guidelines for United Nations personnel engaged in peacemaking". The guidelines are in the final stages of review, and will be followed in the near future by similar tools intended to ensure that peacekeeping operations and peace-building efforts are attentive and responsive to children's rights and needs.

Working group on child protection training for peacekeeping personnel

12. In 2001, the Office of the Special Representative, UNICEF and Radda Barnen, in collaboration with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, convened an informal working group which has produced a complete draft set of training materials that can be adapted to the mandate of any mission and used to train staff from the military, police and civilian contingents of a multi-component peace operation. In August 2002, the training materials underwent further revision and adaptation for pilot testing with staff of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) later in the year. By early 2003, the materials should be available for distribution, including on CD-ROM. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has indicated that it plans to use these materials to strengthen the training of its field staff.

13. A comprehensive package for child protection training and supervision of the conduct of staff towards children in mission areas will benefit from the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises (see para. 48 (b) below). The Task Force is currently working, with the active participation of the Office of the Special Representative, to ensure that applicable codes of conduct preclude exploitative relationships with young people, and that standard operating procedures

incorporate child-sensitive investigative protocols and sanctions for staff found to have transgressed the codes of conduct.

Child protection advisers

14. The Office of the Special Representative continued its efforts to integrate systematically child protection objectives in the mandates of peace operations, including through the deployment of child protection advisers. As a core member of the Integrated Mission Task Force on Afghanistan (see para. 48 (a) below), the Office actively pursued these goals with respect to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. As a member of the Task Force on Angola (see para. 48 (f) below), the Office has also worked to strengthen child protection capacity within the recently established United Nations Mission in Angola, including through the establishment of the post of Child Protection Adviser. Similar efforts are under way with respect to the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea and the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Liberia, as well as the newly established Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa. These efforts are in keeping with Security Council resolutions 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), and the presidential statement on children and armed conflict of 2002, which specifically called for the inclusion of child protection staff in peacekeeping and peace-building operations.

15. The Office of the Special Representative continued to work with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNICEF in the deployment of child protection advisers at UNAMSIL and MONUC. There are now two advisers at UNAMSIL. In addition, over the past year, four new advisers have been deployed to MONUC, bringing the total number of international professional staff assigned to the Child Protection Unit to 10.

III. Country visits

16. During the reporting period, the Special Representative visited Northern Ireland, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Angola, the Russian Federation, including Northern Caucasus, and Afghanistan. During these visits, the Special Representative systematically engaged with a wide range of actors, in particular political leaders, United Nations country teams, non-governmental and civil society organizations, the diplomatic community, children and their families, women's groups, religious leaders and the media. In addition, the staff of the Office of the Special Representative undertook visits to Peru and El Salvador, as well as follow-up visits to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Country visits by the Special Representative

Northern Ireland

17. The Special Representative undertook a second visit to Northern Ireland, from 17 to 19 December 2001, to assess the progress made on the issues raised during his visit in 2000. The Special Representative was impressed by the advances made in the consolidation of the peace process, and the enhanced participation of young people in that process. He was also very encouraged by the consensus reached and the steps taken towards the establishment of the office of Commissioner for Children in Northern Ireland.

18. The Special Representative was very concerned to learn that the recruitment and use of children by paramilitaries was on the rise as a result of persistent fears, sectarian perceptions, and socio-economic factors. He also expressed serious concern about the continuing practice of the so-called "punishment beatings" directed at young people by paramilitary groups.

19. At the conclusion of the visit, the Special Representative made several recommendations, including the need to:

(a) Address sectarianism more effectively in homes, schools and at the political level, in order to stem the inter-generational transmission of fear and prejudice;

(b) Address the socio-economic factors that motivate the recruitment of young people into paramilitary groups by providing them with better educational, vocational and other opportunities necessary for economic advancement;

(c) Promote the participation of young people in the consolidation of peace across segregated

communities and political divides with the support and involvement of community-based organizations, youth groups and other relevant actors;

(d) Maintain children's issues at the forefront of political and public attention and action during the consolidation of the peace process;

(e) Establish the office of Commissioner for Children in Northern Ireland (the bill to establish the office was introduced in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 24 June 2002);

(f) Convene an international workshop in Northern Ireland to compare experiences and lessons learned regarding ombudspersons and national commissions for children.

Guatemala

20. The Special Representative visited Guatemala from 24 to 28 February 2002 and was encouraged by a demonstration of renewed commitment by political and civil society leaders to the peace accords as the indispensable framework of efforts for consolidation of peace, democracy and development. He was impressed by the very positive impact of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), as well as the cooperation between MINUGUA and the United Nations country team. He encountered widespread concern, particularly within civil society, about the plans not to extend MINUGUA beyond the end of 2003. He welcomed the ratification by Guatemala of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in December 2001.

21. The Special Representative expressed concern over the fate of disappeared children, the lack of opportunities for children and youth, in particular in the rural indigenous and resettlement areas, the persistent climate of violence and human rights abuses and discrimination and the high levels of malnutrition.

22. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative made several recommendations, including the need to:

(a) Establish a national commission for the search for disappeared children, in compliance with the recommendation of the Commission for Historical Clarification;

(b) Accelerate, with the support of the donor community, educational reform in order to ensure universal access to education, the strengthening of multicultural and bilingual education, and the introduction of peace education in teacher training and basic and secondary education curricula;

(c) Strengthen the legal framework for promoting the rights and protection of children by enacting into law the Code on Children and Adolescents;

(d) Ratify The Hague Convention on inter-country adoptions as a means of redressing the problem of child trafficking, including across borders. (Ratification of the Convention was approved by the Guatemalan Congress on 13 August 2002.);[2]

(e) Accelerate the implementation of the national programme on food security and nutrition in order to address the existing nutritional crisis among children;

(f) Develop strategies for monitoring the implementation of the commitments related to children and youth contained in the peace accords.

Ethiopia

23. The Special Representative visited Ethiopia from 3 to 8 March 2002. The Special Representative expressed concern over the plight of displaced and separated children and the large numbers of mines and unexploded ordnance. The Special Representative was encouraged by the fact that no systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers had taken place during the conflict. He was also satisfied with the effective organization and delivery of humanitarian provisions by the local authorities to displaced populations and camps.

24. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative made several recommendations, including the need to:

(a) Establish, with donor support, conditions for the return and resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees by providing, in particular, schools, health centres, water and mine-clearance programmes;

(b) Accelerate and expand initiatives to reunite children with their families and communities;

(c) Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the

Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons[3] and the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines.[4]

Eritrea

25. From 9 to 13 March 2002, the Special Representative visited Eritrea where he witnessed the strong cooperation between UNMEE and the United Nations country team. He also noted the excellent rapport between UNMEE and the local population. The Special Representative was impressed with the way in which the cooperation and rapport had translated itself to the effective implementation of the project on quality improvements in the primary schools. While expressing concern over the condition of displaced and separated children, and the large number of landmines, the Special Representative was encouraged to learn that no systematic recruitment of child soldiers had taken place during the conflict.

26. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative made several recommendations, including the need to:

(a) Create conditions, with the support of donors, for the resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees through the provision of basic social services, such as housing, health, water and sanitation and schools, as well as mine-clearance programmes;

(b) Broaden and strengthen the initiatives to reunite children with their families and communities;

(c) Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

27. The Special Representative urged both Eritrea and Ethiopia to accept the then imminent decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission, in order to create conditions for definitive peace between the two countries and to address longer-term needs of children affected by the conflict. He also urged the integration of issues concerning children and armed conflict in the agenda of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development so that protection, rights and well-being of children would become a subregional priority. The Special Representative called for child protection as an explicit objective of UNMEE, including the establishment of a position of child protection adviser.

Angola

28. The Special Representative visited Angola from 11 to 17 May 2002, and was most encouraged by the universal conviction among Angolans that the long war had come to a definitive end. This hope was strengthened by widespread sentiments of reconciliation and national unity among all segments of Angolan society.

29. The Special Representative was particularly concerned by the large numbers and appalling conditions of internally displaced children, especially those emerging from previously inaccessible areas; large numbers of separated and orphaned children; extensive landmines; widespread malnutrition; and the almost total destruction of the country's health and educational systems.

30. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative made several recommendations, including the need to:

(a) Address the urgent humanitarian crisis and its impact on internally displaced children, especially those emerging from the newly accessible areas of the country, by providing, inter alia, food, water, sanitation and health care;

(b) Redirect national and international resources towards the rehabilitation of social services for the benefit of children, in particular schools, basic health services and nutritional programmes;

(c) Support mine clearance, provision of prostheses and mine-awareness campaigns;

(d) Develop a "Voice of Children" radio programme;

(e) Place the protection and rehabilitation of children as a central component of the United Nations Mission in Angola, including through the establishment of the posts of child protection advisers;

(f) Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines.[5]

Russian Federation, including Northern Caucasus

31. The Special Representative visited the Russian Federation, including the three republics of Chechnya,

Ingushetia and North Ossetia-Alania, from 17 to 24 June 2002. He was impressed with the hospitality that the Ingush people and their government extended to Chechen internally displaced persons and by the reasonable conditions and services provided to them in Ingushetia. He was also encouraged by the fact that the different religious expressions in the region had not been a factor in the conflicts in Northern Caucasus.

32. The Special Representative drew particular attention to the situation of displaced populations. He received assurances from the Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, the President of Ingushetia and the Government of Chechnya that internally displaced persons would not be forced to return to their places of origin in accordance with the principle of voluntary return. The Special Representative also expressed concern about the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance on children, the massive damage in Grozny, reports of the enlistment of children by the insurgents, and reported abuses committed by security agencies against young persons suspected of being associated with insurgency groups.

33. The Special Representative made several recommendations, including:

(a) Continued provision of humanitarian assistance by the international donor community;

(b) Observance of the principle of voluntary return of the internally displaced populations;

(c) An end to the use of landmines, and increased provision of assistance for children maimed by landmines and unexploded ordnance;

(d) Implementation of Order Number 80, issued by the military commander of Chechnya, to protect civilians against possible abuses and violations by military forces;

(e) Acceleration of the process of ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict;

(f) A call to the insurgents to halt the enlistment of children the targeting of civilians and the use of children to plant landmines.

Afghanistan

34. The Special Representative visited Afghanistan from 21 to 28 July 2002 and was encouraged by the universal expression of relief at the emergence of peace, the remarkable signs of recovery in the places that he visited and the resilience of children, as well as their thirst for schooling. The Special Representative expressed concern over the deplorable condition of displaced and refugee children, especially those living in the holding camp of Kili Fazo in the "no-mans land" at the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan; the large number of orphaned, street and working children; the children killed or maimed by landmines and unexploded ordnance; the chronic malnutrition and high infant mortality; and the virtually destroyed educational system.

35. At the conclusion of his visit, the Special Representative made several recommendations, including the need to:

(a) Urgently rehabilitate schools, provide educational materials and pay teachers;

(b) Reverse chronic malnutrition through income-generating projects and other initiatives designed to help to reduce severe poverty within families;

(c) Focus special attention on the basic health conditions of women and children, including through the provision of extension and mobile medical services;

(d) Organize a food-for-school programme that would enable street and working children — who are at present compelled to work to earn food for their families — to attend school;

(e) Provide sustained support for mine clearance, the provision of prostheses and mine-awareness campaigns;

(f) Support efforts to strengthen traditional Afghan values that protect children;

(g) Establish a national commission for children that would help to translate the needs and concerns of children into national and international priority setting, policy-making and resource allocation;

(h) Organize a national conference of Afghan children to raise awareness and focus attention on children's concerns;

(i) Develop a "Voice of Children" radio programme that would provide education, entertainment and health advice to children, as well as promote tolerance and reconciliation;

(j) Include a post of Child Protection Adviser in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan so as to ensure that the protection, rights and rehabilitation of children and young people are assigned priority in all aspects of United Nations activities in Afghanistan.

Country visits by members of the Office of the Special Representative

Rwanda

36. A member of the Office of the Special Representative visited Rwanda in June 2002 to assess the progress made in respect of four key issues which have constituted an agenda of ongoing dialogue between the Special Representative and the Government of Rwanda since 1999: the Gacaca process of traditional conflict resolution; Law 22/99, enacted in 1999, enabling women and girls to inherit property; young persons in detention; and child combatants. The Office welcomed the launch of the Gacaca process in June 2002, and recommended that the Government of Rwanda prioritize within it the cases of approximately 3,000 detained young persons who were aged between 14 and 18 years in 1994.

37. During the visit, it was confirmed by the Government and non-governmental organizations that many families had resisted Law 22/99 because of the way it altered traditional inheritance rules. The Office recommended that the Government collect data on the situation of child-headed households in the upcoming national census and that it engage in more active promotion of the law in local communities.

38. The Office welcomed reports that there had been no recruitment of youths under the age of 18 years into the armed forces since the Government demobilized 2,063 child soldiers in 1997. However, it expressed concern about reports of the recruitment of youths into the local defence forces, which are uniformed and frequently armed. An even greater problem is that of the children among the primarily Hutu insurgents fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this connection, the Office urged an immediate assessment of the child soldier population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo so that programmes for disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration can be developed and implemented.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

39. A member of the Office of the Special Representative undertook three follow-up visits to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, from 10 to 23 January 2002, held meetings with representatives of faith-based organizations and youth groups in Kinshasa, Kisangani, Goma and Bukavu. The second visit, from 26 March to 4 May, was devoted to the organization of workshops in Kisangani and Bukavu to mobilize local actors in raising awareness of international norms and standards for the protection of children, in collaboration with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UNICEF and local non-governmental organizations.

40. The third mission, from 13 to 21 June laid the groundwork for the planning and preparation of a follow-up workshop, to be held in the near future to promote strengthening of the capacity for monitoring, advocacy and networking on children affected by armed conflict in the eastern part of the country. The Office also organized a review meeting with child protection advisers and UNICEF child protection staff in Kinshasa to discuss collaboration between child protection advisers, UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative, including the monitoring and reporting roles of the advisers. Meetings were held with the National Bureau for Demobilization and Reintegration, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations in Kinshasa to review lessons learned from the demobilization experience of the Government and the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie (RCD-Goma).

41. The Office held consultations with the Special Adviser of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Nairobi regarding cooperation and modalities for a Great Lakes conference on the cross-border effects of the subregional conflict on children. A meeting was held with a representative of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help the Panel to gather evidence of cases of child exploitation in the extraction of natural resources.

Peru

42. The Office of the Special Representative participated in the first Latin American and Caribbean coordination workshop on strengthening non-governmental capacity-building, networking and advocacy, held in Lima on 14 and 15 May 2002, which was organized by the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. A member of the Office made a presentation on its mandate and activities, and put forward specific recommendations of the Office on issues pertaining to the impact of the proliferation of light weapons and small arms on children and youth.

El Salvador

43. At the invitation of the Pro-Busqueda association for the search of disappeared children, a member of the Office of the Special Representative visited El Salvador from 21 to 23 May 2002. The Office held discussions with civil society actors, non-governmental organizations, the Central American University, UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on the lessons learned from the rehabilitation and reintegration of war-affected children and former combatants during the post-conflict era, and on the need to take measures to redress the absence of a culture of peace 10 years after the end of the armed conflict.

Sierra Leone

44. A member of the Office of the Special Representative undertook a follow-up mission to Sierra Leone from 22 to 26 July 2002, and met with staff of the National Commission for War-Affected Children, which had been established following a recommendation made by the Special Representative during his visit to Sierra Leone in 1999. The Office worked with the Government to establish the Commission which is now operational. As at July 2002, the Executive Director, 12 commissioners and 8 technical staff had taken up positions at the Commission. The Office of the Special Representative participated in the Commission's strategic planning exercise, and will continue to support the efforts of the Executive Director, the commissioners and staff to implement its work plan.

45. The Office debriefed the UNAMSIL Senior Child Protection Adviser, to document and learn from her experiences in order to further strengthen child protection functions within UNAMSIL and in other peacekeeping operations. The Office also finalized arrangements with UNAMSIL to launch the Voice of Children initiative in Sierra Leone.

Economic Community of West African States

46. The Special Representative welcomes the recently established Child Protection Unit at ECOWAS, following a proposal made by his Office and the support it has provided over the past two years. A member of the Office met with the Child Protection Adviser to ECOWAS at Abuja to discuss the programme of work of the Unit. They agreed to collaborate on a number of initiatives, including joint missions to the Mano River area to assess the situation of children. Meetings were also held with ECOWAS and non-governmental organizations in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria to discuss the initiative of the Office to create a West African non-governmental network on children and armed conflict, which would work with the Child Protection Unit.

IV. Integrating and embedding the agenda for children and armed conflict in the work of the United Nations system

Special session of the General Assembly on children

47. The Office organized and cosponsored several activities connected with the special session of the General Assembly on children:

(a) An open session of the Security Council on children and armed conflict;

(b) A panel meeting entitled "Reclaiming our children: The United Nations responds to the plight of the child soldier", cosponsored with UNICEF and featuring the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, the Administrator of UNDP, the Special Representative, the Executive Director of UNICEF, the President of the United Nations Foundation, the Head of Caritas-Makeni, the testimonies of two former child soldiers, and a short video on child soldiers. The panel highlighted the recruitment of child soldiers as one of

the more lasting and destructive effects of war, and underscored the importance of resources and commitment to effectively demobilize, rehabilitate and reintegrate former child combatants into their communities;

(c) A panel meeting on child soldiers targeting policy makers and the business community, organized at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York;

(d) A panel meeting protecting girls and boys during armed conflict, cosponsored with UNICEF, which presented recent developments in the work of the Security Council on children and armed conflict, as well as governmental and non-governmental initiatives for monitoring and reporting on the situation of such children;

(e) A workshop organized by a coalition of non-governmental organizations on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1379 (2001) and the Optional Protocol;

(f) A photo exhibition on the impact of armed conflict on girls, held in collaboration with UNICEF, the Government of Canada, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and non-governmental organizations;

(g) An inter-generational dialogue with the participation of the Special Representative and Graca Machel, which offered young people the opportunity to engage directly with heads of States;

(h) A meeting with youth representatives to discuss the formation of the Youth-to-Youth Network: Making a Difference for Children Affected by Armed Conflict. The Office also participated in "Creative expressions: youth against war", an event sponsored by non-governmental organizations which provided groups of young people from around the world an opportunity to communicate their experiences in conflict through theatre and art.

Collaborative action with partners in the United Nations system

48. The Office of the Special Representative intensified its participation in a number of established and ad hoc United Nations executive committees and coordination mechanisms, among which are the following:

(a) **Integrated Mission Task Force on Afghanistan**. As a core member of the first Integrated Mission Task Force, the Office contributed to the overall development of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and promoted the agenda for children and armed conflict as a concern which cuts across the political and operational pillars of the Mission. The Office also initiated the elaboration of an agenda for children in Afghanistan, which was prepared and submitted jointly with UNICEF and endorsed by the Task Force. The agenda outlines the devastating effects that the war has had on children, and sets out areas for priority action and funding;

(b) **Task Force of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises**. In the wake of the allegations of sexual abuse and exploitation of refugee children in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea by United Nations and non-governmental humanitarian personnel, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee established a task force to coordinate the response of the humanitarian community to those allegations. The Office of the Special Representative has actively participated in the Task Force from the outset. Significantly, the Task Force intends to build on the work of other relevant inter-agency and inter-departmental processes, including the working groups referred to in paragraphs 11 and 12 above. The Special Representative participated in the meeting of principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, held in Rome in April 2002, which adopted the policy statement prepared by the Task Force. In June 2002, the Standing Committee endorsed the plan of action prepared by the Task Force and expressed support for the implementation of the plan to December 2002;

(c) **Joint Task Force of the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, United Nations Development Group and Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs on peace-building**. In November 2001, the Office participated in the elaboration of a set of principles that would underpin the development of a United Nations peace-building strategy. This was endorsed by a joint meeting of the executive committees and the Development Group;

(d) **Joint Task Force of the United Nations Development Group, Executive Committee on Peace and Security and Executive Committee for Humanitarian Affairs on Afghanistan**. The Office contributed to the elaboration of the one-year and five-

year United Nations programmes of assistance to Afghanistan, drawing from the agenda for children in Afghanistan which the Office has developed in collaboration with UNICEF;

(e) **Working Group of the United Nations Development Group on mainstreaming conflict prevention into the Common Country Assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework**. The Office participated in meetings of the Working Group in order to ensure that the protection, rights and well-being of children are at the forefront of United Nations system-wide strategies to help prevent conflicts by addressing their root causes;

(f) **Task Force on Angola**. The Office continues to contribute to a United Nations coordinated and integrated response to the situation in Angola. As a result of the engagement of the Office, the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council (S/2002/834), proposing the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Angola, emphasizes the importance of the protection and rehabilitation of children, including through the establishment of a position of Child Protection Adviser.

Commission on Human Rights

49. The Special Representative submitted his report to and addressed the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-eighth session.

Committee on the Rights of the Child

50. In August 2001, the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) notified the Office of the Special Representative of the presence of 603 children within the armed forces of Guinea-Bissau. As a result, the Office worked with UNICEF and the Department of Political Affairs to provide advice to UNOGBIS and the UNICEF country office on the demobilization and reintegration of those children. The Office requested the Committee on the Rights of the Child to help to obtain a clear picture of the extent to which a comprehensive programme for the disarmament, demobilization, resettlement and reintegration of child soldiers had been implemented. In its concluding observations, the Committee recommended that the State party: (a) demobilize all under-age soldiers; (b) address the psycho-social needs of child soldiers; (c) continue its landmine detection programme; and (d) seek technical support for these measures, including support from UNICEF.

V. Reaching out to young people

51. The Office of the Special Representative has continued to promote several youth outreach initiatives.

Global peace schools

52. In an effort to involve young people in promoting the agenda for children and armed conflict through school curricula, the Special Representative launched the "global peace schools" initiative, in collaboration with the Mohammad Ali Center and non-governmental organizations. Working with New York-based educators, a lesson plan, based on the first United Nations humanitarian novel on children and armed conflict, *Marie: In the Shadow of the Lion*, was developed and piloted at the Norman Thomas School, New York, designated by the Special Representative as the first Global Peace School. By June 2002, when the manuscript of a second book on children and armed conflict, *Thomas and Deng: Paradise Burning*, was completed, a number of schools in the United States of America, Europe, Latin America and Australia expressed interest in using lesson plans based on the books.

Youth-to-Youth Network

53. The Office of the Special Representative is facilitating the formation of an informal network of young people to work on issues of children and armed conflict. The concept was discussed during consultative meetings convened by the Office of the Special Representative in April and May 2002, with the participation of over 50 young people from 20 peaceful and war-affected countries. The young people proposed the formation of the "Youth-to-Youth Network: Making a Difference for Children Affected by Armed Conflict". Work continues towards the launching of the Network.

Voice of Children

54. The Office of the Special Representative has continued to develop the Voice of Children project. In Sierra Leone, where the project is most advanced, UNAMSIL Radio has agreed to oversee and manage it for a temporary period, with the support of local West African and Sierra Leonean personnel. As part of the arrangement between UNAMSIL and the Office of the Special Representative, Sierra Leonean institutions will be identified and/or recruited to work with UNAMSIL in order to strengthen their technical and managerial skills sufficiently to take over the initiative when UNAMSIL departs. Young Sierra Leoneans will also be trained to participate in the Voice of Children initiative.

VI. Media outreach

55. Throughout the reporting period, there was wide international and national media coverage of the activities of the Special Representative and of issues of children and armed conflict. Interviews were carried out with the Special Representative on many occasions in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: the BBC, Radio 5, *The Guardian*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Reuters* and *Africa Today* (in London); in the United States of America: Voice of America, CBS, NBC, the *Los Angeles Times*, Associated Press, *Newsweek* magazine, CNN, CNN International, *The New York Times*, the *Las Vegas Sun*, National Public Radio, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and All Africa.com (in Washington, D.C.); Radio France Internationale and Agence France Presse; in Japan: NHK and *SGI Quarterly*; Xinhua (China News Agency); in South Africa: Channel Africa, the *Sowetan*, the *Mail & Guardian*, South African Broadcasting Corporation, TV Africa and *The Star* newspapers; in Angola: Angolan television, Radio Ecclesia, DP Angola, Jornal de Angola, Agora and Folha 8; in Portugal: LUSA News Agency, Publico and Radio-Television Portugal; in the Russian Federation: Itar-Tass, *Moscow Times*, Interfax and *Izvestiya*; the Inter Press Service; UN Radio; and the Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Notes

[1] General Assembly resolution 54/263, annex I.

[2] Ratification of the Convention was approved by the Guatemalan Congress on 13 August 2002.

[3] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 360, p. 117.

[4] Ibid., vol. 2056, p. 211.

[5] Angola acceded to the Convention on 5 July 2002.